



February 10, 1999

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Dear Ted,

Thank you for your letter of January 29, which arrived on Monday the 7th.

I would like to thank you again for your help with Mello's manuscript. I do still apologize for the inconvenience it caused. I thought you might like to know the Attila reference has been changed to the Star Chamber.

(p.1, ¶ 3) I will change the text as indicated. I am glad you have decided to use the remaining text in a footnote, and hope that my argument has not compromised the integrity of your book. On the same score, a long time ago I suggested some edits to *Truth versus Lies*. You mentioned a certain Professor Piranian, by way of explaining your reluctance to submit the manuscript to a line-edit. You specifically noted that tedious changes should be avoided. I then dropped the matter, since a line edit is 90% tedium. If you think that you will have time to go over editorial changes, I will submit them to you. I am mostly concerned with the rare instances of awkward construction, but, like I said before, I am not going to push the matter. I have already mentioned the two parts of the book I might edit considerably (the correspondence with your mother & the Tarmichael affair) and you have indicated that this conflicted with the interest of full disclosure. So, the changes I am after would be tedious, but I think they would add to the book, since eloquence is associated with credibility. Let me know if you are interested; the delay would be negligible provided there was time in your camp to do the review.

(p.1, ¶ 4, and P³S) I have for the most part found Jensen's book to be interesting, and I am considering it for publication by Context Books. He is a good writer. I think you are right to say that Jensen has an artist's sensibility. He has integrity, although it shows signs of emotional contrariness based on personal trauma. Integrity is perhaps not the best word. Jensen's strength is definitely not as a rationalist; his value lies elsewhere.

But I suspect that Jensen's contrariness may find too much of its genesis in childhood traumas and not hard-won principle. An example would be his understanding of Gilgamesh's rise to

power. He seems to think that Gilgamesh wanted to rape the woods for lumber more than he wanted to use that wood to establish the city over which he reigned supreme. He goes on from this rather poor illustration, to posit a theory that human civilization is one long history of man's unconscious desire to specifically deforest the planet (which to me reeks of an *idée fixe*) since deforestation is clearly a by-product of the desire for power. There is no argument to accompany or bolster the statement, only canted selections from the annals of time. Having said this, I do think Jensen's argument is important: As a child, Jensen's father abused him under the personal (and sadistic) banner of paternal law, order, and progress (Jensen's progress towards manhood). Nature is dominated and abused under society's unconscious (or ideologically driven) banner of law, order, and progress. This domination causes individuals to lose touch with their own nature (or individuality) as well as the natural world, which is thought to be a necessary condition for the proper functioning of our self-destructive society. Although I find the general premise holds up, I take issue with the solipsistic manner in which he sometimes unfolds the polemic.

Arthur Rimbaud once wrote that a poet must nurture himself like a man cultivating warts on his face (I'm not sure if I have remembered it verbatim). It is a strong image of individual development in direct opposition to societal pressures to conform. I cite Rimbaud to contrast the notion of petty contrariness, highlighting the importance of individuality for its own sake (*i.e.*, not defined in opposition to anything or anyone else). I like people of whom it is said, "When they made that character, they broke the mold." Jensen is essentially that sort of character. He has what I would loosely refer to as a "good heart," which is synonymous with a certain freedom from the dehumanizing aspects societal indoctrination (courage, for example, finds its root in *couer*). He thinks his own thoughts, or at least endeavors to do so as far as that is possible while obeying the rules he must follow as a "member" of a sect. (I am no different, although I'd be hard put to tell you exactly what my "sect" might be.) In other words, Jensen may not be supersaturated with the mores of the status quo, but his identification with a codified system of belief (*i.e.*, environmental activism) as defined in contradiction to another system (*i.e.*, the status quo) necessarily compromises his individuality. At this point, Jensen figures as an example of a larger issue, and I have no interest in a critique of him as an individual. I've enjoyed my interaction with him thus far.

I try to avoid labels, even (or especially) when chosen by the person to whom they are attached. I believe Jensen refers to himself as an environmentalist and an activist. The latter would of course be a statement of fact if he has taken action in aid of a cause, which I believe he has. The former seems reductive, since Jensen is doubtless many other things—*e.g.*, a human being, which is not reductive, the implication being that human beings are psychologically and intellectually complex creatures.

All this has been written towards a response to your query regarding my stance vis-à-vis the desirability of a changed society. (p. 4, ¶ 5) It is interesting that we have recently corresponded about language. Labels are problematic, because they rarely describe the signified object with much exactitude. Perhaps math offers solid, non-ideological proofs (I am out of my depth... but I remember thinking mathematical deduction was pretty random in its presuppositions)—in any

case, language is undeniably a rather difficult vehicle for exact expression. The same word in a different context can drastically change our understanding of reality.

When I was a child, my grandfather once said: "Did you know that a factory," pointing at the wire mill, "is also called a plant?" I thought that was pretty interesting as a ten-year-old. I was mystified by this information (society is generally and permanently mystified by the manner in which language modifies the reception of fact). How curious that something so paradigmatically unnatural can have the same name as something that is so very much part of nature! My grandfather's illustration about the uses of language (and it was an intentional illustration) stayed with me. As a teenager growing up during the Reagan trickle-down/Bush read-my-lips era, I became more adept at reading between the lines. I'd like to think that I recognize the wiggle of ideology. But to understand it, and convey that understanding is to grab hold of a vapor trail on the open highway. And yet one can take a picture of that vapor trail, as it were, and so *something* can be brought back from the limen of the conscious and the unconscious factors that initiate the complex "apparatus" of human will.

I would very much like to see the day when society has been rescued from itself. I am very pessimistic with regard to the prospects of this happening. And I am implicit in the problem, surely. I resist labels, this is also true. And so? So, I am not an anarchist, although a friend has called me an "*anarchos-capitalist*." I am political, but I do not affiliate myself with any particular party. I would were there a Common Sense party (although not if it was some bastardized Dewey-like program). I try to observe behavior in context to better understand the societal forces that are being exerted on that behavior. Reading between the lines, keeping score—but on the sidelines. I do not rightly know what my label would be (left myself wide open there), and perhaps that is why I added that proviso about our respective stances with regard to the desirability of a changed society. Also, I do not have a clear picture of what you would do were you to find yourself, reins in hand, with the opportunity to effect a change that might save society from self-destruction. You will be perhaps better equipped to analyze the ideological headwaters of my opinion, but I do believe that societal change is a gradual process, and I doubt that it can be achieved any faster by violent means. In fact I doubt that it can be achieved at all. But I hope, and I try to give all possible solutions serious consideration.

Derrick asked me what my position was with respect to the environment, activism, *et al.* This was my response: "My politics revolve around the belief that society is a juggernaut speeding out of control. I want to publish books that will effect a change in both society and myself. I have never called myself an environmentalist, and eschew all labels, but environmentalism [sic; what I meant was the compromised state of the environment] is one of the many ills I wish to address through the aegis of publishing. I believe literature is a very important element in the process. Humble, terrifying, ugly, beautiful truth is my goal. I would like to write an "essay" about our society composed of the books I publish.

(p. 2; ¶ 7) I wish I could play guitar for you, too. I do not play any Vivaldi. The only Vivaldi for guitar (that I have heard) is an arrangement by John Williams for "The Four Seasons." I never

learned it since I was pretty sure (understatement) that I wouldn't have the chance to play with a full orchestra, and the guitar part sounds silly all by itself. I do play Bach (although not as well as I used to), and I very much enjoy Fernando Sor (1789-1836). Sor's etudes are very simple, and in that simplicity they are perfect. When you called on Christmas Eve, there was some classical music on the radio. I hoped, at the time, that you could hear it. Could you? I know little about your life in prison. But I imagine a tape player was not part of the (plea) bargain. Maybe you can arrange to call (with advance notice) and I can have music of your choice turned all the way up... Suppose that might qualify as a wasted phone call, considering the limitations applied thereto.

(p. 3, ¶ 2) I have the same problem with German and Swedish, (and it gets even worse with Norwegian, Danish, Dutch). I can read a newspaper in the latter languages with varying degrees of effort. But even Swedish and German sometimes give me a hard time when it comes to understanding the spoken language. I cannot understand Swabian or Bavarian. It sounds to me like duck quack-and-gibber. There are some charming dialects in the south of Sweden (Skånska and Småländska), which have been influenced by visiting Germans and Danes. I understand it for the most part; but when they get going, it's "grab your hat and hold on for dear life" (i.e., I have to pay close attention and comprehend 60% of what's being said). Practice, practice, and geographic placement are the only cure for what ails us.

(p. 3, ¶ 3) I am interested in the letters you have received about *Industrial Society and Its Future*. I will contact Quin Denvir and show him the specific page of your most recent letter that discusses the correspondence. If you have not already informed him of the project, he will need this before sending anything to me. A visit to the University of Michigan will take some doing, given the demands on my time at present. I wonder if it would be possible to request that materials be sent to me here in New York. Let me know if this will be possible. (re. p. 3, ¶ 4) The secret is safe with me. I apologize for that stupidity with regard to a foreword to *Industrial Society and Its Future*. Your commentary would be of great interest to me. Again, I would most like to publish the manifesto under its proper title and a by-line for the author. I know this is problematic at best. (Please comment, through Bonnie if necessary.)

(p. 3, ¶ 6; p. 4, ¶ 2) I did receive the letter to _____, as you have noted. But I have yet to contact her. I met with Paul Davis yesterday to discuss the jacket design for your book and he was struck by the FBI-inscribed quaking aspen, but he thought it would look more interesting if the photograph were taken from a slightly different perspective. I plan to send your letter to _____ and ask her whether she might have the time to take some photographs in Florence Gulch. Davis also wanted some shots of the enclosure where your cabin used to stand. I'm looking forward to contacting _____ since Michael Ulveman told me she was very nice to him during his visit and subsequent phone calls.

(p. 4, ¶ 4) I received your latest letter in an unsealed envelope upon which someone had written "CLOSED—2/6/99." Unfathomable.

(p. 4, ¶ 6-7; p. 5, ¶ 1-2) Waits's cronies, if they are anything like Bobby Didriksen, speak for themselves by virtue of their corpulence alone. When I read *The Missoulian* article, I was astonished by Waits's cynical supposition that he was more credible than you were simply because he is not in jail. It underscored what I believe to be the truth about Waits: He and his pals are common hucksters. News about Waits's book has not yet gained national attention. I am waiting, but feel as each day goes by that it might not happen after all. I liked your letter to the *Independent et al.* I sent word through Bonnie that *The Missoulian*, *The Helena Independent*, and *Montana Magazine* are all owned by the same company. This would explain the unfair treatment your letter received in these publications.

I really like the pidgin you cited. Disfella Waits, nem tell bad disfella Ted... Wish I had more to go on, since I enjoy imitating the stuff. Amos Tutuola, a Nigerian writer, provides some great pidgin in *The Palm Wine Drinkard and My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. Chinua Achebe, and I believe Wole Soyinka, have claimed that the book lacks authenticity, but I may be remembering the dispute inaccurately. It may be that they accused him of cribbing folk tales. I can have a paperback sent to you if you like. Also, thanks for the anecdote.

(Post Scripts) I have received items #28 through 33. I have checked for stories by Sallinger and nothing has been aired about you yet. As for Mello's book, you most certainly can assume that there's no more to do (thank you so much for your help), the book is going to be produced in galley form in a couple of weeks. I'm just now combing through it one final time for typos and the like.

I hope this letter finds you well.

Yours,

Alan.

encl: 2 NYTimes articles (different versions), National Law Journal article